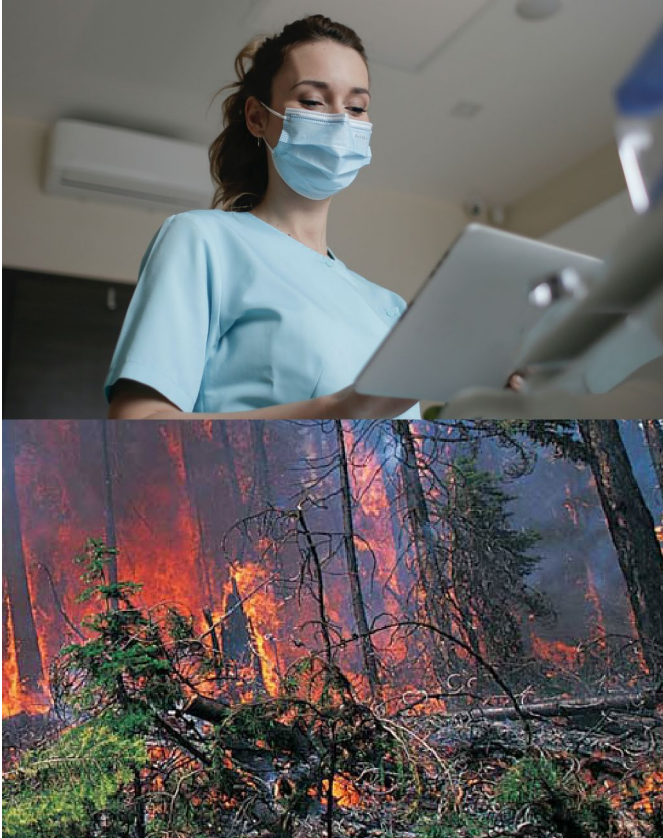


Report of the Advisory Committee on Francophone Affairs to the Government of Saskatchewan



May 2021

Public Health and Emergency Situations

Letter of Transmittal

Mr. Todd Goudy
Legislative Secretary, Francophone Affairs Liaison

Following the Advisory Committee on Francophone Affairs meeting of September 11, 2020, it is my pleasure to submit this report for your consideration.

On this occasion we met with representatives from Francophone community organizations, the Saskatchewan Health Authority, the Saskatchewan Public Safety Agency and the Ministry of Health to discuss access to services in French in public health and emergency situations.

On behalf of our Advisory Committee, I am pleased to present to you with this report. The recommendations herein which are meant to guide the government and public agencies in the development and delivery of French-language services that would help to improve health and safety outcomes for the Francophone population.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'M. Dubé', written in a cursive style.

Michel Dubé
Chair, Advisory Committee on Francophone Affairs
May 2021

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Summary

The current Covid-19 pandemic has highlighted the importance of communications in both official languages in public health services and our response to emergency situations.

Saskatchewan does not have legal obligations to provide services in both official languages in these situations, but when considering situations of personal health and safety, the priority should be to reach as many people as possible and to ensure they understand messages from authorities.

The Advisory Committee recognizes the efforts of the Ministry of Health and of the Saskatchewan Public Safety Agency towards offering French-language services, and the recommendations in this report are meant to build on the work currently being done.

Recommendations:

1. That the Saskatchewan Health Authority identify employees with French-language capacity.
2. That the Saskatchewan Health Authority strengthen and formalize their relationship with the Réseau santé en français de la Saskatchewan to focus on ways to enhance French-language services.
3. That the Minister of Mental Health and Addictions, Seniors and Rural and Remote Health build an ongoing relationship with the Fédération des aînés francosaskois.
4. That the Saskatchewan Public Safety Agency publish bilingual alerts sent by the federal government in both official languages on SaskAlerts.
5. That the Saskatchewan Public Safety Agency look into the feasibility of publishing provincial alerts in both official languages.

Advisory Committee Mandate

In 2003, the Government of Saskatchewan adopted its French-language Services Policy. With this policy, the Government of Saskatchewan committed to “enhancing the services offered to Saskatchewan’s Francophone community in support of the development and vitality of this community.”¹

The policy is organized according to three areas:

1. Communication;
2. Development and delivery of services; and
3. Consultation.

The mandate of the Advisory Committee on Francophone Affairs is to advise the Legislative Secretary, Liaison for Francophone Affairs, through the review and analysis of programs and policies to guide the implementation of Saskatchewan’s French-language Services Policy.

¹ Government of Saskatchewan French-language Services Policy

Context

On September 11, 2020, the Advisory Committee on Francophone Affairs met with senior officials from the Ministry of Health, the Saskatchewan Health Authority (SHA) and the Saskatchewan Public Safety Agency (SPSA) as well as representatives from Francophone organizations to identify measures that could be taken to improve the delivery of French-language services in public health and emergency situations.

Emergencies in public health and safety are inevitable; the public counts on authorities to be vigilant and to put measures in place, quickly. The Ministry of Health, the SHA and the SPSA actively plan for emergencies in order to protect the citizens of Saskatchewan. These plans anticipate all possibilities to ensure they meet the needs of the population. These plans should include language requirements so that “... official languages stop being an afterthought and start being an integral part of crisis management”.²

Public Health

SHA CEO, Scott Livingstone, said in an October 2015 News Release, “... transformation in the Saskatchewan Health Authority will come from the strength of our people”. The offer of services in French to the public necessarily involves the presence of employees who are able to offer these services.

A recommendation was made by the Advisory Committee in June 2012, “**that ministries, Crown corporations and other agencies voluntarily identify French-speaking employees in the public service.**” The Government of Saskatchewan now conducts a biennial survey of all of its employees to better understand language capacity. To date, this has allowed for the identification of more than 250 public servants, across the province, who are able to communicate in French. This information is shared with all ministries, Crown corporations and agencies, who can then decide how they will deal with requests for services in French.

The list is also available online to the public. There are currently 121 points of service within government where services can be offered in French.

The Advisory Committee feels that the same could be done for SHA employees across the province. The SHA has over 40,000 employees. If even 2% of its employees, which is the percentage of Francophones in our province, were able to deliver services in French, there would be 800 employees that could help make Francophones’ interactions with the health system less stressful and confusing. This could improve outcomes for these citizens.

The Advisory Committee is pleased that the SHA is taking steps in this direction as part of a federally-funded project called *Building Capacity*. Once the SHA has identified the language capacity of its employees, and where it may be able to offer services in French, training will be provided to employees on how to implement an active offer of French-language services.

² [A Matter of Respect and Safety: The Impact of Emergency Situations on Official Languages](#)

Recommendation #1

That the Saskatchewan Health Authority identify employees with French-language capacity.

Working Together

The Advisory Committee is very pleased with these initiatives, however it feels that it would be beneficial to the SHA to build a formal relationship with the provincial Francophone organization that focuses on health care in French, the Réseau santé en français de la Saskatchewan (RSFS).

When legislation was proclaimed in December 2017 to launch the Saskatchewan Health Authority, the government said that maintaining community engagement and local relationships was a priority for the Saskatchewan Health Authority.

Agreements that formalize the relationship between the SHA and First Nations and Metis organizations have been signed. They committed to working together to identify common priorities and programs that are being developed to reflect the need to better understand and make accommodations for cultural and spiritual beliefs.

The Francophone population also sees that there is a need for better understanding and accommodations, but in this instance it would be in the area of language accommodations. This would allow for the sharing of best practices and perhaps innovative ideas and collaborations that would support the development and delivery of French-language services in public health.

Recommendation #2

That the Saskatchewan Health Authority strengthen and formalize their relationship with the Réseau santé en français de la Saskatchewan to focus on ways to enhance French-language services.

A Vulnerable Population

The 2016 Census indicated that Saskatchewan had 170,425 individuals over the age of 65 which represents 15.5% of the total population. The percentage of Francophones over the age of 65 in Saskatchewan is double that, at 33.7%.

Saskatchewan Seniors Mechanism (SSM) published a report in 2019, *Strategizing for Positive Aging in Saskatchewan*. SSM is a provincial organization that brings together Saskatchewan seniors' organizations with the common vision of achieving a better quality of life for older adults in the province. The Francophone seniors' association, the Fédération des aînés francsaskois (FAF), is a member. Access to primary health care in their community, timely access to specialists and procedures, and affordability of all aspects of healthcare, including prescription drugs, are of the most concern.

Francophone seniors have an added concern. Research has shown that as bilingual people age, they begin to lose their ability to communicate in their second language. Dr. Magda Stroinska and Dr. Vikki Cecchetto from McMaster University found that “... non-native speakers who learned English and used it competently in adulthood, begin to lose elements of the language in their elderly years, reverting to their native tongue.”³

Saskatchewan’s population is projected to grow over the next 25 years. The percentage of people over the age of 65 years in Saskatchewan is projected to increase to about 23% of the population by 2038 (Statistics Canada 2016 census). Long-term planning is needed to respond to the needs this trend will create, including those in public health and safety.

The SSM and their members feel that a government structure is needed to address seniors’ issues at a provincial level and that policy should include input from those who may be most affected.⁴

The Advisory Committee recognizes that the government now has a minister responsible for seniors. The Francophone population fears its concerns have not yet been heard and wishes, as does the SSM, to be able to participate in the planning of programs and services developed to address their needs.

Recommendation #3

That the Minister of Mental Health and Addictions, Seniors and Rural and Remote Health build an ongoing relationship with the Fédération des aînés francosaskois.

Emergency Situations

In his 2019-2020 Annual Report, the Commissioner of Official Languages states that if there is one area where both official languages must be equally respected, public safety is it. He recommends that the Prime Minister “encourage provinces and territories to identify the causes of repeated breaches of the right to safety and to examine potential avenues for cooperation” to ensure that public safety is not at risk.

SaskAlert is the Government of Saskatchewan’s emergency public alerting program that provides critical information on emergencies in real time, so citizens can take action to protect themselves, their family and their property. Canadians do not have the option to opt out of the emergency alert system, which provides warnings about extreme weather, wildfires, civil emergencies, and other dangers.

Alerts can be issued by: Environment and Climate Change Canada, Government of Saskatchewan ministries, Crown corporations and agencies as well as participating local jurisdictions.

³ <https://dailynews.mcmaster.ca/articles/researchers-study-second-language-loss-in-elderly/>

⁴ <https://skseniormechanism.ca/wp-content/uploads/2019/11/Executive-Summary-2-low-resolution-for-website.pdf>

Over a year ago, when testing the Emergency Alert System across the country, citizens received loud test messages on their smart phones. Even though there was plenty of warning beforehand, there were reports that the emergency alert system scared or stressed some citizens and made them feel anxious or helpless. Receiving information in your second language may add to this confusion. It is important to understand that there is a difference between using a second language in your everyday living and using that language when you are sick, injured or afraid.

The government's priority should be to make every effort to reach as many people as possible during an emergency and to ensure that they will understand.

Recommendation #4

That the Saskatchewan Public Safety Agency publish bilingual alerts sent by the federal government in both official languages on SaskAlerts.

Recommendation #5

That the Saskatchewan Public Safety Agency look into the feasibility of publishing provincial alerts in both official languages.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the Advisory Committee was encouraged by the participation of the ministry and agencies. There was good discussion around best practices and shared challenges. The Advisory Committee was also encouraged with the plans already initiated by the SHA and the openness of the SPSA to research different options. As stated above, emergencies in public health and safety are inevitable. It is by working together that solutions will be found to ensure that Francophones in the province understand the information being shared with them and what is being asked of them. This will improve outcomes for everyone.

Advisory Committee on Francophone Affairs - List of Members

At the September 11, 2020 Advisory Committee meeting, the members were as follows:

Michel Dubé (Chair), Prince Albert

Michel Dubé was born in Duck Lake. He has been involved with the Francophone community in Saskatchewan for a long time, notably in community development and education. He was a member of the board of the Assemblée communautaire fransaskoise between 1999 and 2010, first as the community representative from the Prince Albert district and then as president between 2006 and 2010.

Mr. Dubé has been a journalist, consultant and entrepreneur. He has owned several businesses including a produce farm and a fishing lodge. He is now owner of a small store featuring local goods and operates a bison farm north of Prince Albert.

Élizabeth Perreault, Bellevue

Élizabeth Perreault and her husband own and operate a farm near Bellevue. Ms. Perreault has volunteered within many organizations in her community, including the local Francophone association and the Francophone school in her area. She has represented the St-Isidore school district (Bellevue) on the Conseil scolaire fransaskois since 2008.

Joanne Perreault, Hoey

Ms. Joanne Perreault has worked for more than 10 years with the Assemblée communautaire fransaskoise, several years of which as deputy director. Living in Hoey, Ms. Perreault is self-employed, providing consultation and coordination services, and continues to be involved with the Fransaskois community.

Roger Gauthier, Saskatoon

Living in Saskatchewan for the past 40 years, Mr. Gauthier has been actively involved in the Fransaskois community both as a professional and as a volunteer at the local, provincial and national levels in multiple sectors: communications, economics, community development, cultural and artistic development, education, and involvement with parent and early childhood issues. Over the past seven years, his commitment has focused more specifically on improving access to health services in French through his role in the Réseau Santé en français.

Janice Murphy, Regina

Living in Saskatchewan for almost 20 years, Janice first worked at Collège Mathieu, offering, among other things, computer training for Francophone women in the province. She has volunteered with various Fransaskois associations, including the Fédération provinciale des Fransaskoises (FPF), the Association communautaire fransaskoise de Gravelbourg (ACFG), and the Association canadienne-française de Regina. She started a family with her spouse from the Republic of Côte d'Ivoire, enabling her to experience French education from daycare to Grade 12, and to better understand the challenges and successes of French-speaking newcomers. She currently works as a senior human resources partner with the Crown Corporation, Farm Credit Canada (FCC).

Denis Simard, Regina

Denis Simard has been involved in the Canadian Francophonie for many years. A graduate of College Mathieu in Gravelbourg, Denis was Executive Director of the Association jeunesse fransaskoise and of the Assemblée communautaire fransaskoise (ACF). An engaged Fransaskois citizen, he first became involved with the Conseil jeunesse francophone de la Colombie-Britannique, the Conseil culturel fransaskois, and the Centre culturel Maillard. He was elected president of the ACF in 2018.

Jolanta Bird, Saskatoon

Jolanta Bird is a student, entrepreneur and active community member. As an Aboriginal woman, she is keen to learn about First Nations traditions, notably through her involvement with the Gordon Tootoosis Nikaniwin Theatre Company. She graduated from École Valois in Prince Albert where she was president of the student council. She is active in the Francophone community as vice-president of the Association jeunesse fransaskoise (Fransaskois youth association). As a board member at the youth association, she participated in a conference marking the 50th anniversary of the Official Languages Act. She currently studies Business at the University of Saskatchewan and plans to pursue her studies in Law.